Research Essay: Meat Dress dated Nov 1st, 2024

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Tracey Ho
Tracey_ho_2@sfu.ca

I'm obsessed with art fashion and one thing catch my eye is a meat dress. Back in 1987, the first meat dress was created by a Czech Canadian artist, name Jana Sterbak.

Jana Sterbak was born in Prague, Czech Republic in 1955 and she immigrated to Montréal, Québec in 1968. She studied in Vancouver School of Art, Vancouver, British Columbia in 1973-74 and University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia in 1974-75. She then graduated and received a Bachelor of Fine Art at Concordia University, Montréal, Québec in 1977 and University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario in 1980-1982.[1]

She received below awards:

- 1991: Guggenheim Fellowship, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, United States.
- 1993: Prix Antoine Guichard, Foundation Casino, Musée de Saint-Étienne, France (now discontinued)
- 1993: Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award from the Canada Council.
- 1996: Prix Ozias Leuc, Fondation Émile-Nelligan, Montreal.
- 2012: Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts, Canada.
- 2017: Prix Paul Émile-Borduas, Québec.[2]

Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic is one of a selected art piece of Jane Sterbak**.** She created the work in 1987. The flesh dress was exhibited at the Galerie René Blouin in Montreal, later display at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. She used 50 to 60 pounds of raw flank steaks stitch and sew together and hung on a hanger. The meat was fresh and bloody red. "It is

[1] Jane Sterbak – Department of Art History. Concordia University. https://art-history.concordia.ca/eea/artists/sterbak.html

[2] Jana Sterbak. Wikipedia the free encyclopedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jana_Sterbak

a one-piece, sleeveless, calf-length "house dress", with a jagged edge. The marble texture of steak and the thick fat are fully visible, displaying its expressive and bloody appearance. "[3]

The title 'Vanitas' associates with time which means fast, short and it only lasts for a short period of time. And, "Vanitas is the Latin for vanity, in the sense of emptiness or a worthless action".[4] It connects with meaninglessness and symbol of death. Sterbak shows her idea on a dress, a fashion and a body. Time and fashion are related which keep running and changing, the bloody meat cannot last too long, it will rot. – it is a dark humor. Fashion likes a piece of meat which will not last for a long time. People cannot stay in one fashion forever.

Another way to interpret Sterbak's work is to combine ordinary, physical objects to attract and surprise viewers' thinking and feeling. People may feel the red bloody meat is smelly and gross. It may discourage viewers to eat meat. And, the fresh meat may push viewers to consider and remind how women's bodies are actually consumed in daily life. On the other hand, Sterbak may tell viewers that women prefer to wear fresh meat on their bodies and not to eat the meat?

Different people have different interpretations. Some people said, "You are what you wear" It means a female is a piece of meat, powerless, purchasable, consumable and no value and status in society. Is this what Sterbak communicate with the viewers? – a feminist issue.

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[3] Curator's Pick, Jana Sterbak, Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic, 1987. https://curatednow.ca/jana-sterbak-vanitas-flesh-dress-for-an-albino-anorectic-1987/

[4] Vanity. The National Gallery, London. https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/vanitas#:~:text=Vanitas%20is%20the%20Latin%20for,the%20everlasting%20nature%20of%20faith.

Another meat dress is designed by Franc Fernandez. (Francisco C. Fernandez) and styled by Nicola Formichetti. Fernandez is an Argentinian artist, a fashion designer and a creative director based in Los Angeles and New York. He was born on April 12, 1986, in Argentina and lived there until moving to Sylmar in San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles at age eight.[5]

Fernandez attended both ArtCenter College of Design for graphic design and architecture and art school but dropped out of both. Fernandez said that he was not good in school and he is a self-trained. He was interested in making outfits mostly for custom made pieces.

Fernandez has worked with many famous musical artists, including Lady Gaga, Sam Sparro, Scissor Sisters and Beyoncé Knowles. He did the styling for Scissor Sisters' UK arena tour. And, he directed the music video for Sam Sparro's "Pink Cloud".

His famous work is a meat dress which is designed for the singer, Lady Gaga to wear on the MTV Video Music Awards on September 12, 2010 in Los Angeles, California.

The dress is made of raw flank steak, it is about 50-60 pounds. The meat is purchased from Fernandez's local butcher, Palermo Deli, in Granada Hills. The dress was made onto a corset. He puts salt on the meat to drain any leftover liquid and used a strong nylon thread to sew the meat together and cover the corset. It took two days to finish the dress. The dress is preserved with taxidermy techniques and now is located and display at the Haus of Gaga Museum in Las Vegas.

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[5] Franc Fernandez. Wikipedia, Wikipedia the free encyclopedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franc_Fernandez

Franc Fernandez created the meat dress
Franc Fernandez | Gagapedia| Fandom

Lady Gaga and the meat dress and the display at the Haus of Gaga museum in Las Vegas

Lady Gaga tells us that the meat dress communicates a statement, she believes one's need to fight for what one believes in. She highlighted herself that the dress was against the United States military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy – which prevented lesbian, gay, and bisexual people from discussing their sexual identity.

The meat dress creates other argument. Some people are angry because of the animal rights. The meat dress was crude and inhuman. Many animals are already killed for foods. The artists should not encourage to use animals' meat to make fashion. However, some people said what is the different for people who wear leather clothing.

People start to think about identity and gender in modern society. Why using red meat to replace fabric, why not using chicken or fish? and why flank steak meat is worn on a female body and not on a male or children bodies? Traditionally, flank steak is a high-status food which is for upper class people to purchase and eat. Red meat contain protein for growth. Male need

protein to grow larger and more muscle for hunting in the old days. Men are dominated not only over women but also in many ways, including in culture, politics, economy and societies.

Fashion in relation to art

By looking at these two pieces of artworks, what is the relationship between fashion and an art? Fashion and art are truly tied together. Both are involved with creativity and expression. Fashion can tell your personality, style, and identity. Fashion, like art, is a reflection of society, history and culture too.

Andrea Zittel, A-Z Personal Uniforms

An American artist, Andrea Zittel's A-Z Personal Uniforms is a good example to show fashion and art are linked together closely. Zittel was born in Escondido, California, in 1965**.** She received a Bachelor of Fine Art in painting and sculpture from San Diego State University in 1988 and an MFA in sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence in 1990.

Below are her awards[6]

- Deutschen Akademischen Austausdienst (DAAD Grant) (1995)
- College Art Association Distinguished Body of Work Award (2006)
- AICA Award for Best Architecture or Design Show (2007).

Zittel spent many years to experiment and redesign uniforms, starting in 1991 and end in 2023, a total of three decades. (1991–2003), (2003–2013), and (2013–2023).

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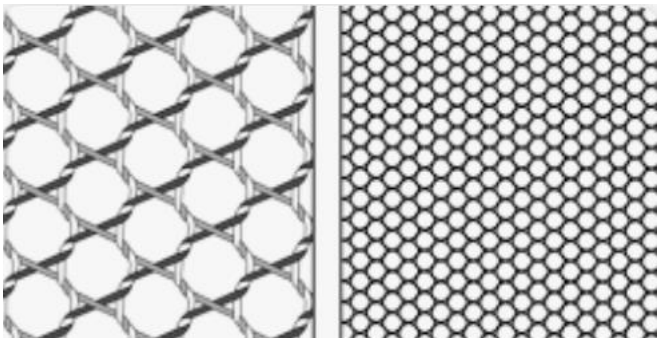
[6] Andrea Zittel, Guggenheim, New York. https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/andrea-zittel

At the beginning, she was sick and tired of wearing different clothes everyday. She then started her six-month uniform project, she wore the same dress for six months, starting in 1991. During the six months, she will design her next perfect dress for the following season.

A-Z Personal Uniforms (1991-1995)

At the beginning, Zettel used simple techniques, like sewing and straight-cut wool garments. Then, She decided to change from simple cloth garments to silk applique with tulle patterns (a net-like fabric with a hexagonal pattern) and combine with wool petticoats.


Tulle patterns

A-Z Personal Panel Uniforms (1995 – 1998)

After four years of making uniforms, Zittel found difficult to come up with new styles and ideas. She then decided to make some guidelines on making the uniform, like using rectangles woven to make a dress.

A-Z Raugh Uniforms (1998)

Zittel's next idea called Raugh, using safety pins hold the straps to a rectangle fabric uniform and fabric seams. It took skills to make designs and look attractive.

A-Z Single Strand Uniforms (1998-2001)

Zittel used wool yarn and crochet hooks instead of woven fabric. She found out it was convenient, only need a crochet hook, no need to use scissors to cut the fabric and thread. And she can make dress anywhere.

A-Z Hand Made Stranded Uniforms

Zittel lately found out crochet hook is not a good idea because she may loss crochet hooks and she needed to use different sizes of crochet hooks to knit a dress, so she started to use the yarn directly by fingers, weaving technique and make the uniform. Later, she decided to use her own body to weave a cover – like an insect spinning its own cocoon.

Crochet with fingers and hands

A-Z Advanced Technologies: Fiber Form Uniforms (2002-2023)

After removing all tools to make the fabric, she then goes for the yarn. She found out the yarn was originally made by felting wool. She used hands on the felting wool directly and form a garment. The cloth is made in one piece and there are no seams. Zittel even uses the new fiber form technology on making furniture.

White Felted Dress

In reality, a piece of art serves an inspiration, making viewers to think, feel and observe; however, fashion is wearable of your cultural beliefs and opinions. Fashion has a primary function which is for protection, comfort and self-expression. The main purpose of an art is to inspire thought, express emotions or challenge judgement and concepts. Fashion involve in business, designers must consider market value, brand identity and consumer preferences. An artwork relates to personal or cultural context, artists do not pay attention on commercial purposes. Fashion keeps changing rapidly from season to season, but art is timeless. And, fashion is focusing on how to wear a cloth and recognized in social settings. On the other hand, art is inspiring viewers to involve in deeper meanings, contexts, and emotional responses.

Craft versus High Art

The meat dress demonstrates the difference between craft and high art. Although both art and craft are creative forms, they are different in their purposes, techniques, and historical status. The goal of a craft is to design a specific item or product for serving a function or a solution whereas an art is to create an object to express and inspire ideas and emotions, to develop empathy and understanding and to raise social change, self and cultural awareness.

An art does not need to have a technique to make. There is no rules or instruction to create an art, for example drawing, painting and sculpture. However, a craft needs to follow some instructions to form an item, such as knitting, weaving and embroidery. There are certain steps that we need to follow.

An art is not like a craft which cannot be reproduced again and again. For example, **Vincent van Gogh's Starry Night**. There is only one Starry Night in the world, so the value is very high. Craft is an item that can duplicated therefore the value relatively is lower.

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